Water and Weather...

First, let's hit the basics from W to W..

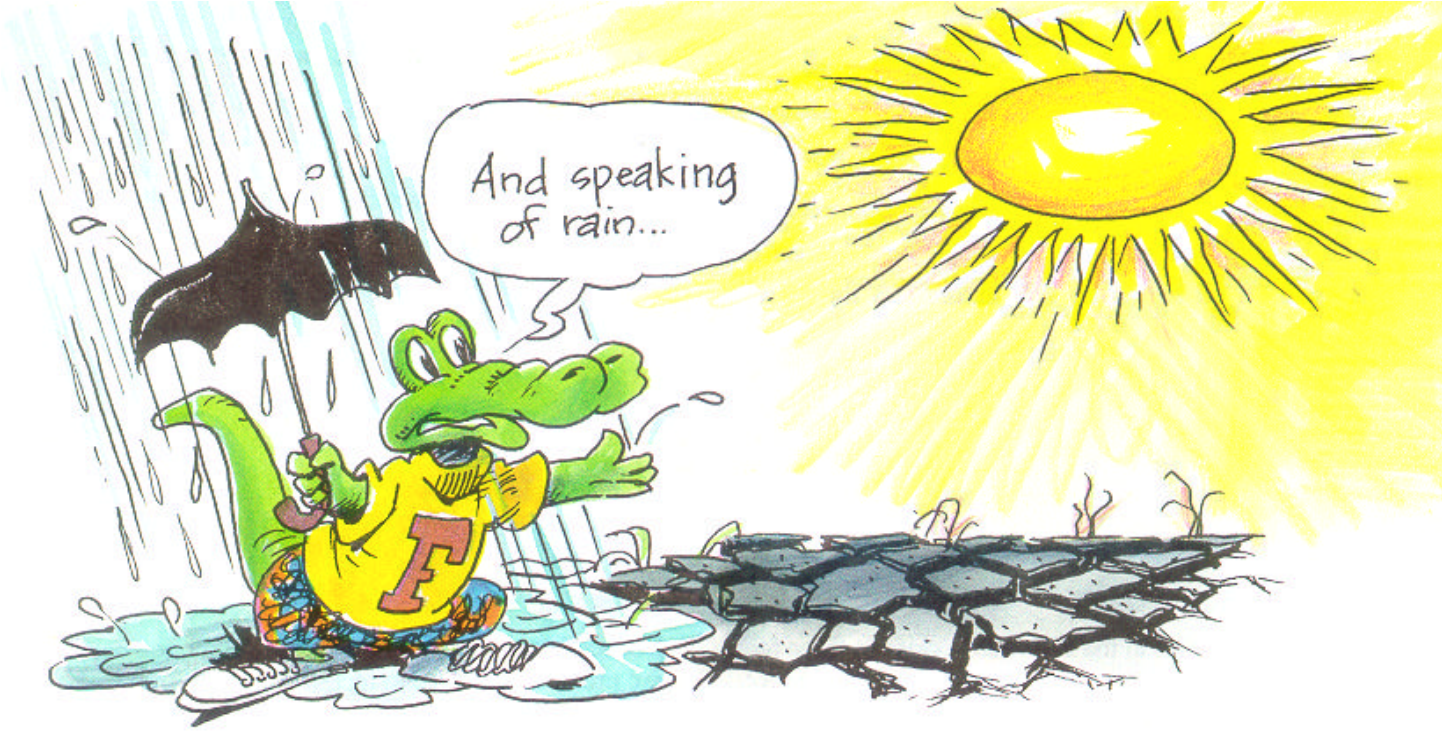
You may already know about the water cycle, but just in case you're a little rusty, here's a quick refresher. Clouds dump precipitation on us—in South Florida we don't get much snow or hail, but rain is certainly no stranger—55 to 60 inches per year.

The rainwater goes into rivers, lakes, wetlands and canals. Some keeps on going until it hits the ocean, some never makes it that far. The warmth of the sun turns the water into vapor through evaporation. Or, through evapotranspiration—big word that means water is taken in through plant roots, then is released into the air from the leaves. An estimated 45 inches of rainfall is returned to the system this way.

One detour in the water cycle is percolation—into the ground. Check it out on the drawing...some water soaks down into natural underground pockets of sand, rocks and water, known as aquifers. Water is usually trapped there unless somebody drills a well and brings it back topside.

Whether it's from lakes, wetlands, trees or sawgrass, eventually the water warms and turns back into vapor. The vapor rises, cools, turns back into microscopic water droplets, and forms clouds. Next thing you know, it's raining again and the whole cycle repeats itself.

GROUNDWATER



They call Florida the Sunshine State. But, if you've been here more than a few hours, I don't have to tell you that one thing South Florida knows is rain. See, weather around here changes a lot from place to place and year to year.

During our rainy season from June to October, they'll usually get from 10 to 15 inches more of rain down around Miami than they will up along the Kissimmee River. And in our dry years, we'll get less than half as much rain as in our real wet years.

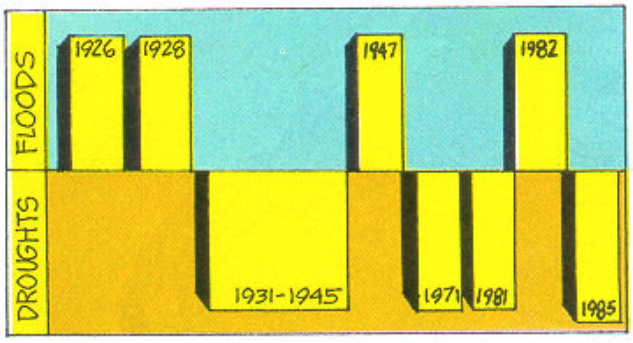
So it's no wonder that we have been known to go from floods to droughts very quickly. Furthermore, we have the extra added attraction of hurricanes, which can really spoil your day, and sometimes a whole lot more.

But, as I said before, you never know when the weather might change from mega-rain to big drought. And even the best weather forecaster can't say for sure what's coming next more than a few days in advance.

Then, think about all the new people and new businesses in South Florida over the last few years. You can see why there's so much talk about having enough water down here, especially since we all want to protect the natural beauty of South Florida, as well.

But that's another story I'll get to later. Here are a couple of charts to give you a feel for the areas where we get the most rain, and the years when we've had unusually high or low rainfall.

Wet and Dry Years



Regional Rainfall